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The Minister/The Ambassador ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044) 19 Dec 77

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

RSO:RJKelly

(X) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part (X) In Full

Mothers of Plaza de Mayo ( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

RSO recently met with a senior member of the Argentine Security Forces who has been involved in the counter-subversion program for approximately 5 years. Source has reported reliably in the past and is knowledgeable concerning Army and Federal Security Service operations in the greater Buenos Aires region. Source stated that the Federal Security Service and, to the best of his knowledge, the Army, were not involved in the sequestering of the Plaza de Mayo Mothers or of the two French nuns. Either they were taken into custody by the Navy or they were kidnapped by Montonero forces. The most likely explanation is that they are victims of the political ambitions of Admiral Massera who has been seeking ways of undermining President Videla's influence. The kidnapping of the Mothers and Nuns just prior to Christmas holidays would undermine Videla's "Peace by Christmas" position and hold him up to international ridicule. Also, it would weaken his position as President and leader of government in Argentina. Source stated the Navy has the operational and intelligence capability to have successfully pulled off the kidnappings.

Source stated the Montoneros have been working toward a spectacular to commemorate the Monte Chino incident of December 1975. This incident could possibly have been the spectacular they plan for December. However, it is a possibility, not a probability. In order to have successfully executed the kidnapping, a considerable amount of intelligence would have to be available to the Montoneros: the number of people who would be attending the church at that particular time; the fact that one of the nuns would be at that location; the knowledge of what security forces might be operating in the area. Additionally, they would need vehicles for the transportation of their hostages and safe houses in which to hold them. The acquisition of safe houses in and of itself is a very difficult task and requires coordination of many persons. The Montoneros have not recently been

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involved in kidnappings because of the difficulty in maintaining safe houses secure from the Security Forces. It would require a major logistics effort to develop safe houses for the sequestering of 12-15 people. This represents an effort far exceeding what has to date been considered within their limitations.

Another consideration is how would the Montoneros use their hostages. It is obvious that the government could not acquiesce to the purported Montonero demands. Consequently, they would be faced with initiating some action against the hostages in retaliation. This would place the Montoneros in a position of having to kill the Mothers or their members and to kill nuns of a country that has become one of their operational bases. Either or both of these actions would be disastrous to the movement. Consequently, source does not believe the Montoneros initiated this kidnapping but is more inclined to believe it was done by the Navy under direct orders of Admiral Massera. Source equates this operation to the kidnapping of Ambassador Sola earlier this year which he feels was done by the Navy to undermine the success of President Videla's trip to Venezuela.

Source stated it would be impossible for the Army or any elements of the Army to have committed this operation without the President finding out about it within a day. Source stated the operation against the mothers and nuns is the most serious problem the government has been forced to face in a long time. There is an enormous amount of dissatisfaction among the military and security services concerning this situation. Heretofore, families of subversives were not subject to operations; that is an unwritten understanding. Even Santucho's parents (ERP leader) were allowed to leave the country unmolested. Source stated that within a few days the Montoneros would be called upon to either denounce the information that they were responsible for the kidnapping or to further elaborate on it. Similarly, the government will be forced to make further announcements concerning the kidnappings. The situation is further complicated by the meeting scheduled between the Secretary of the Armed Services this week and the subsequent meeting that is scheduled between President Videla and over 50 Army generals shortly thereafter. Source stated the situation concerning the nuns and mothers must be totally and honestly clarified prior to or at the time of that meeting or General Videla's position in the Army will be seriously undermined. Source stated the main question to be considered next week is whether or not Admiral Massera, as a senior member of the Junta, will be required to resign next year or whether or not his tenure will be extended until March 1979. The big question is, who goes first.

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In further discussion on this subject, source agreed that had the kidnapping been a Montonero operation, all elements of the military, Navy and police security services would have been requested to conduct broad-based anti-subversive operations and investigations to determine the whereabouts of the mothers and nuns. To date, this has not been the case. Although there have been numerous personal inquiries between members of the Federal Security Service and Army concerning the case, there has been no formal request for investigation and operations. Source stated he believes there should be a clarification of the situation within a few days.

Additional sources with close contacts in the military indicate a strong dissatisfaction on the part of the Army concerning the entire episode with the mothers and the nuns. Many officers feel that if this is a government operation it has besmirched the reputation of the Army. They do not want to be associated with operations of this nature. Source stated that Army intelligence units appear to be bewildered by the case of the kidnapped mothers and nuns. None of them to date have attributed this operation to the Montoneros. All sources agree that this week will be an extremely difficult one for President Videla.

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